



High-Quality Bilingual Education in Pre-K to Third Grade is a Literacy Strategy

IDRA Testimony on Interim Charge: Early Literacy and Numeracy Outcomes, submitted by Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., to the Texas House Committee on Public Education, August 13, 2024

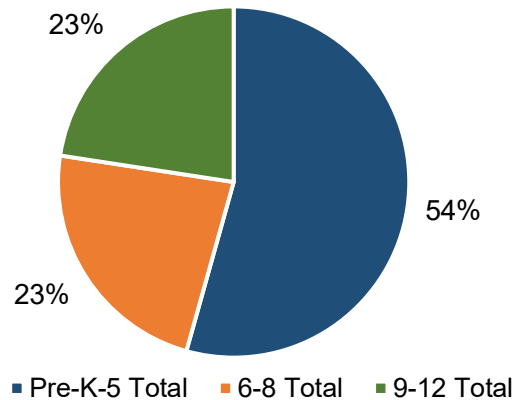
Dear Chair Buckley and Members of the Committee:

My name is Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., and I serve as the deputy director of policy at IDRA. IDRA is an independent, non-partisan non-profit committed to achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.

In Texas, emergent bilingual students, formerly called *English learners*, comprise a significant proportion of public school students. More than one in four of Texas' 1.8 million students in prekindergarten through third grade are emergent bilingual students (27%) (TEA, 2023).

Over half of Texas' 1.2 million emergent bilingual students are in elementary school where bilingual education is most frequently offered, with 38% in pre-K to third grades.

Texas Emergent Bilingual Students Across Elementary, Middle and High School Grades



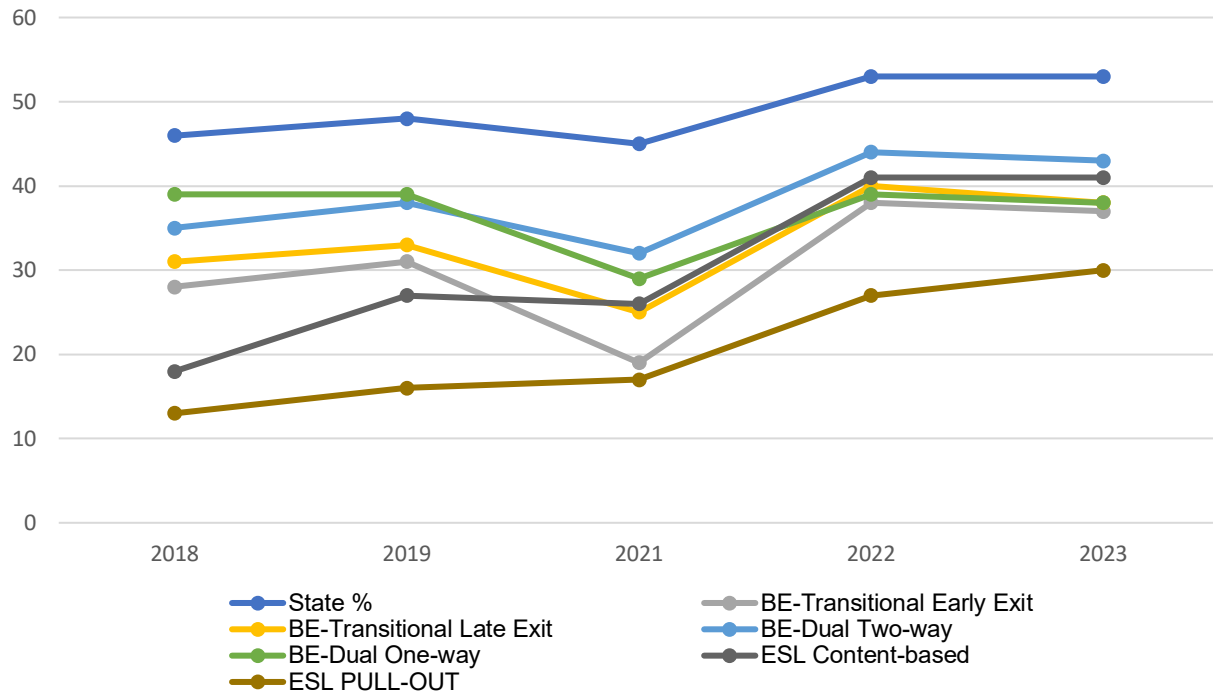
Data source: Texas Education Agency, Emergent Bilingual Students by Category and Grade, School Year 2022-23.

High-quality bilingual programs that focus on bilingualism and biliteracy, such as dual language immersion programs, instead of English-only instruction are shown to lead to higher English literacy and test scores for both emergent bilingual students and English proficient students in

those programs (*i.e.*, two-way dual language programs). In a study conducted by the RAND Corporation, students in dual language immersion programs scored significantly higher on reading and English assessments than their peers, accounting for the equivalent of about seven months of additional learning. (RAND, 2017)

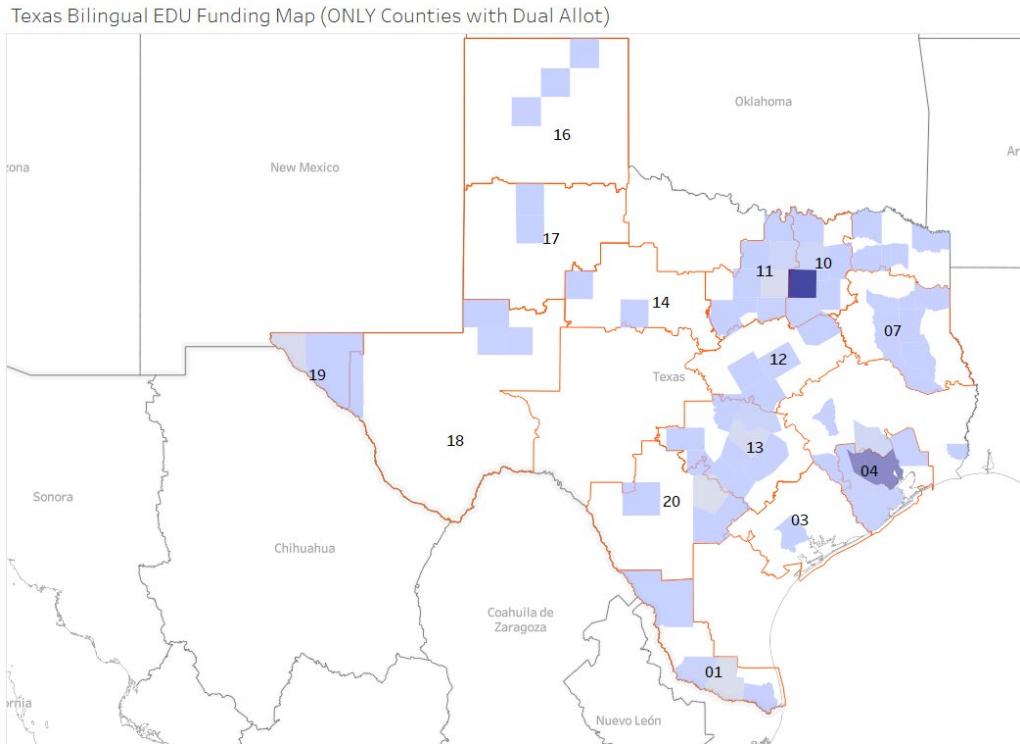
In Texas, students in two-way dual language immersion (DLI) programs consistently scored higher on STAAR in English Language Arts/Reading and sustained stronger academic performance through the COVID-19 pandemic, compared to emergent bilingual students in other types of language programs.

STAAR ELA/Reading Meets and Above Passage Rates for All Grades by Bilingual/ESL Program



Data source: TAPR Reports by Bilingual/ESL Program, 2018-2023 (2020 Not Tested), Texas Education Agency.

Enrollment in dual language programs has increased since 2019, when the Legislature created a separate funding stream in House Bill 3 (86R) through the dual language allotment. Still, only about 22% of emergent bilingual students are in dual language immersion programs, across 198 school districts.



Source: IDRA Dashboard on Texas Bilingual Education Funding, Dual Language Allotment by County (2024).
<https://idra.news/TxMapSchoolFundingBE>

The legislature can take steps to support robust, well-resourced bilingual education programs with certified teachers to improve the literacy and numeracy of young emergent bilingual students in Texas.

Recommendations

To support high-quality bilingual education programs that support young emergent bilingual students' literacy and numeracy, IDRA recommends the legislature:

- Implement the legislative recommendations from TEA's SB 560 Emergent Bilingual Strategic Plan, developed in response to SB 560 (87R);
- Advance legislative support for bilingual program monitoring, support and educator training for effectively teaching emergent bilingual students, as outlined by HB 2164 (88R);
- Invest in specific educator preparation and residency programs and in-service teacher supports to address recruitment and retention of certified bilingual/ESL teachers in the workforce;
- Expand and improve the Texas performance acknowledgement in bilingualism and biliteracy to meet State Seal of Biliteracy standards and support high school students who graduate with bilingual and biliterate achievement.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D, IDRA deputy director of policy at chloe.sikes@idra.org.

Resources

- IDRA. (2024). Dashboard on Texas Bilingual Education Funding, Dual Language Allotment by County. <https://idra.news/TxMapSchoolFundingBE>
- RAND Corporation. (2017). Dual-language immersion programs raise student achievement in English. Research Brief, RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9903.html.
- Texas Education Agency. (January 2023). SB 560 Emergent Bilingual Strategic Plan. Texas Education Agency. <https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/sb-560-emergent%20bilingual-strategic-plan.pdf>
- Texas Education Agency. (2023). Emergent Bilingual Students by Category and Grade, School Year 22-23.
- Texas Education Agency. (2024). English Learner Program Reports, 2019-2024. PEIMS Standard Reports.
- Texas Education Agency. (2024). Texas Academic Performance Reports, 2018-2023.

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